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Masculinities Reflected in Hunting by the Heads of State in India - the Mughals and the British: A Comparative Analysis

Abstract

Humans have hunted since pre-historic times to sustain and protect themselves and their homes. As such, hunting came to be intimately associated with masculinity. This pre-historic activity was adopted by kings and heads of the state when human settlements grew into kingdoms and colonies to flaunt their masculinities. The paper compares in detail the hunting techniques and methods of the Mughal and the British heads of state in India and, through intricate analysis, gleans their masculine identities.

Men hunted in pre-historic times so that they could feed themselves and their families. Big game hunting took place when man came across carnivores in the jungle that were out to get food as was he. As man was not the regular prey of carnivores and neither did they form part of his regular diet, they hunted each other occasionally out of a sense of insecurity. Man being physically weaker of the two, started regarding carnivorous animals as dangerous. The notion of masculinity emerged in this context to enable man to overcome the fear of predators and protect him against it in case of an encounter. As Gilmore perceptively remarks: "Once we were all hunters, and our success and therefore the survival and expansion of the group depended upon our developing genetically determined 'masculine tendencies...'" (24). As man

started growing his own food through agriculture and began living in settlements more or less secure; the carnivore and man were out of each other's way. However the notion of masculinity proven in hunting had become part of various cultures by then. Although divested of its initial logic of hunting big game when it threatened life, this notion of masculinity made hunting a pastime for kings who enjoyed its thrill and simultaneously advertised themselves as larger than life men who could court danger for fun. Hunting became a traditional royal sport. Then colonialism, which is referred to in this article in the context of British in India, emerged. The foreign heads of the state found the assertion of colonial masculinity all the more imperative so that a handful of colonizers could impress the multitude of colonized in India and be able to rule. Hunting now became not only traditional but rigidly traditional. Joseph Sramek aptly remarks,

Not only did many Britons seek to emulate various Mughal emperors for whom tiger hunting was an element of kingship, but on the way to presuming themselves the "New Mughals" they had to outdo various regional rulers such as Mysore's Tipu Sultan (who held power from 1782 to 1799) who also employed tigers as powerful symbols of their rule (Brittle-bank 140-46). Tigers also represented for the British all that was wild and untamed in the Indian natural world. Thus, the curious late Victorian and Edwardian spectacle of British royals and other dignitaries being photographed standing aside dead tiger carcasses depicted the staging of the successful conquest of Indian nature by "virile imperial-ists" (MacKenzie 47). More generally, tiger hunting was an important symbol in the construction of British imperial and masculine identities during the nineteenth century. (659)

An analysis of the hunting expeditions of the Mughals and the British state heads, augurs to be revelatory of what kind of men they projected themselves as, consciously or unconsciously; and consequently, what kinds of masculinities their respective states upheld.

The imperial presence in the jungle – the presence of the head of the state – offers some interesting points of contrast between the Mughals and the British. The keywords which first strike us about the Mughals are magnificence and movement. The emperor had a huge camp and a large retinue consisting of elephants, courtiers, coursing cheetahs and servants. In *The Story of Asia's Lions* Chavda quotes Francois Bernier who “travelled through the Mughal empire between 1656 and 1668” (93) and who made the following observation about the emperor's hunting expedition when the army was on the march:

Whenever the monarch is about to take the field, every gamekeeper [gardes chasse] near whose district the army is to pass is called upon to apprise the Grand Master of the Hunt of the various sorts of game under his particular charge, and of the places where they are in the greatest plenty. Sentries are then stationed at the different roads of that district, to guard the tract of ground selected, which extends sometimes four or five leagues; and while the army is on the March on one side or the other, so as to avoid that tract, the king enters it with as many *Omrahs* [nobles] and other persons as have liberty to do so, and enjoys, leisurely and uninterruptedly, the sports of the field, varying them according to the nature of the game.⁷ (*The Story of Asia's Lions*, 93)

Thus, besides other features, the tract of land beaten was also vast. Akbar, the most illustrious Mughal emperor, took a keen interest in hunting. He made an important innovation in the technique of capturing cheetahs alive. Deep pits camouflaged by branches, dug in the paths frequented by cheetahs, sometimes caused injuries to the legs of these animals and, at times, they were able to escape by jumping out. Akbar had shallow pits dug “of 2 to 3 *gaz* (1.83 to 2.74 metres) depth with an automatic trap door which would close once the animal fell in. Sometimes more than one cheetah were caught by the method.” (*The End of Trail: The Cheetah in India*, 45). Neither Chavda, nor Corbett mentions any viceroy taking such a keen interest in hunting. Attitude towards animals and subordinates was another area of difference.

Akbar liked coursing with cheetahs. His trained cheetahs were given names – Madan Kali, Citr Najan, Daulat Khan and Dilrang. Once when Citr Najan caught an antelope after jumping across a ravine 25 yards wide, the emperor “raised the rank of that *cita* and made him the chief of *citas*.” (*The End of Trail: Cheetah in India*, 40). Akbar personally treated the eye ailment of one Fateh Khan who was the keeper of the cheetah called Fatehbaz and even cured him. Thus for the Mughals, masculinity lay in two dimensional hunting – killing big game and capturing it to train it. The emperor was kind to the tamed wild animals. Chavda quotes Abul Fazl on the diet of the captured cheetahs, “The meat is given in a lump [boneless]; and on a Sunday no animals are killed, double the daily portion is given on Saturday.”¹ Quoting Abul Fazl further on maintenance of Cheetahs, Chavda elaborates – “Formerly, every six months, but now annually, four *sers* of butter and one tenth of a *ser* of brimstone, are given as ointment [per cheetah], which prevents itch.”² Similarly Jahangir “could be as considerate as providing warm water for bathing the imperial elephants as they shivered in the cold...and yet think nothing of ordering the execution of a servant for inadvertently interrupting his hunt.”³ However, the same Jahangir treated his Rajput subordinates so well that one of his courtiers, Anup Rai, grappled with a lion barehanded when it attacked the emperor during a hunting expedition. Prince Khurram, in turn, tried to save Anup Rai and the lion was killed eventually. Chavda says “In recognition of his valour Jahangir gave Anup Rai the title *Ani Rai Singhdalan* meaning commander of the troops, lion crusher.”⁴ This incident shows the personal bonds between the Mughals and the Rajputs which held the Mughal domains together until early 1700s.”⁴ This incident further shows that a) the said “personal bonds” in the quotation above were fraught with bonhomie and camaraderie; and b) the emperor, princes and courtiers could tackle a lion

¹ See *End of Trail: Cheetah in India*, 48.

² See *End of Trail: Cheetah in India*, 48.

³ See *Story of Asia's Lions*, 104)

⁴ See *The Story of Asia's Lions*, 104

on foot with swords in hand. This leads us to the conclusion that Mughal masculinity was fraught with brotherhood and bravery. Moreover, an emperor as powerful as Akbar considered it no detraction from his magnificence or masculinity to treat the eye ailment of a servant personally. A notable point in the Mughal style of hunting was that the emperor never hunted from the machan.

The picture of Mughal masculinity which emerges finally is fraught with paradoxes from the standpoint of our own paradoxical hybridity. On the one hand the Mughals were keen hunters and hunted on a large scale, on the other they did not pose the threat of extinction to any species and even trained wild animals whom they treated well. Their reign had so many lions that almost all their paintings show the emperor hunting the lion and not the tiger. This was partly due to the fact that during Jahangir's sovereignty – "Lions were royal game and could be hunted only by the emperor and with his permission the notables in the empire."⁵ The lion disappeared from the entire India except Gir in the British reign. Another paradox was that in spite of Jahangir's occasional eccentricity which made him order the execution of a servant when he disturbed him during hunting; the emperor was held in esteem among the Rajputs and a Rajput courtier was ready to die for him. Again the Mughals' seeming extravagance in their hunting expeditions nonetheless gave employment to a number of classes of people – the retinue servants, the cheetah keepers, the net makers, the game keepers and the painters. The painters "moved with their masters and recorded with minute accuracy various incidents and objects of interest, animals, birds and plants."⁶ Another paradox integrated in the quotation above is that while the Mughals indulged in the rough sport of hunting they had an artistic dimension as connoisseurs of art and every time the emperor hunted, his painters created history which was expressed artistically in their paintings.

⁵ See, *The Story of Asia's Lions*, 94

⁶ *The End of Trail: The Cheetah in India*, 38.

The ensuing section analyzes the hunting trips of the British viceroys with a view to glean the expressions of colonial masculinity in them and assess how it differed from Mughal masculinity. It will be pertinent to quote Chavda at length here:

The epitome of shikar for the British in India was a viceregal shoot. Viceroys and Governors of Bombay more often than not went to shoot in the Gir when on a visit to Junagadh state. The final such visitation for the lions was Linlithgow's in 1942. As usual on such occasions the resources of the state were mobilized to the maximum extent possible. For months before the intended visit, baits of male buffalo calves were regularly fed to lions which were large and had good manes, and therefore marked for the event. Thus they were localized and "anchored" to use RS Dharamkumarsinhji's phrase, to their respective areas. On the appointed day the Viceroy and his party were installed in secure machans and the beat began. The result was predictable enough. A photograph of this last viceregal hunt shows the Viceroy and the Vicerene with their daughter and a daughter of a former viceroy standing in front of a dead lion carefully laid out to record a successful shoot." (*The Story of Asia's Lions*, 121).

In *Jungle Lore*, Jim Corbett describes a vice regal shoot which he organized in Kaladhungi for Linlithgow when the viceroy's office requested him to suggest a place for the same. Firstly, what we observe here is a masculinity which has become tradition bound. Corbett says, "Custom decreed that the ruler of India should tour the southern provinces of his domain during the ten days hiatus between the closing of his Legislative offices in Delhi and their opening in Simla, and it was Lord Linlithgow's decision not to conform to this age-old custom that caused the long to be remembered flutter in the government dovecotes." (Jungle Lore, 122). This is the only remark of Corbett in his description of the vice regal shoot which expresses the personality of Linlithgow. The rest is just the shikar description with Corbett briefly mentioning H.E. climbing the machan number four, for the shoot. As it is in the machan, so it

is in the narration – the H.E. remains in the leaves hidden from the sight of both the tiger and the reader. Thus, the head of the state appears to be a formal and withdrawn person who does not interact with his subordinates much. He seems to have no interest in the hunt either beyond pressing the trigger and making the tiger fall dead. The retinue consists of three hundred men and sixteen elephants which shows a low profile hunt when compared to the Mughals. However the viceroy manages to add a dimension of glamour to the shikar by bringing his wife and three daughters to shoot. The family members shoot one tiger each by sitting on machans when Corbett, along with the elephants and the beaters, manages to move the tiger in the direction of the shooters. A very surprising element of the shikar is that Corbett almost gets Linlithgow's youngest daughter killed inadvertently by placing her on a low machan – just six feet above the ground – which the tiger could and did access easily. However she escapes death when her sister, covering her from another machan, fires in the nick of time at the tiger. Did something happen which hurt or disturb Corbett and which made him commit this error, he does not say. He even assures the reader that the viceroy came again many times to Kaladhungi to hunt. Corbett's demeanour is respectful but distant. He is warmer in his praise of the princess Elizabeth in *Tree Tops* when she comes with her husband to the dense jungles near Nyeri, Kenya to shoot wildlife with a camera. The British royals and Jim Corbett observe wildlife from a house called "Tree Tops" which is located in a giant tree and is thirty feet above the ground. The princess is brave – she calmly walks past a group of wild elephants standing just ten yards away from the Tree Tops stairs she has to climb;⁷ ; interested – watches wildlife and captures it in her camera absorbedly⁸; kind – asks her husband the duke Philip to vacate his cushioned seat at the dining table for the aged hunter⁹ and irritable – mutters a few words when her photographs fall on the floor of the balcony by her own fault¹⁰. The night she spends in

⁷ See *Tree Tops* 387-388

⁸ See *Tree Tops* 389

⁹ See *Tree Tops* 396

¹⁰ See *Tree Tops* 392

“Tree Tops” her father expires and she descends from the tree as Queen Elizabeth II the next day. The princess is kind to Corbett but the meeting is formal, lacking in the bonhomie which we see the Mughals sharing with their subordinates. She also evinces no curiosity about the well-being of the animals. This feature is on view in India as well. It was the nawabs of Junagadh – Rasulkhanji and Mahabatkhanji III – who campaigned for the preservation of the Asiatic Lion when its numbers were reduced to just twelve in the entire India. When Rasulkhanji apprised lord Curzon of the matter, he decided to cancel his hunting trip to Junagadh in which he was supposed to shoot lions and supported the nawab in banning lion-hunting in Junagadh. However when Mahabatkhanji III requested the British Government to help against some Indian royals of the adjoining states who would lure the Gir lions out of Junagadh to hunt them down, the government refused help. If we recall, Jahangir had placed a kingdom-wide ban on bagging the lion.

Thus the keywords and key phrases of British masculinity seem to be – formal, still, distant, tradition-bound, frugal, quietly courageous, wisely courageous, uninterested in the general welfare of wildlife in colonies, and polite. On the other hand the keywords and key phrases of Mughal masculinity – which emerge from this analysis – are magnificent, hospitable, energetic, brave, full of camaraderie, innovative, sensitive to the welfare of wildlife, eccentric, extravagant, flaunting and artistic. Interestingly, when we combine certain qualities of one type of masculinity, meta-qualities emerge. If we join hospitable, sensitive and artistic (the Mughal qualities) – the three translate to femininity and we step into the realm of complex combinations. The Mughals then can be said to be invested with femininity-in-masculinity which, applied to powerful objects – the cheetah and the lion – make the Mughals stand forth as super masculine. This super masculinity of the Mughals becomes supra-masculinity when we see it transcending to being considerate for wild animals and thus touching the wisdom of the ancient sages:

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः

सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।

सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु

मा कश्चिदुःखभाग्भवेत् ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Meaning:

1: Om, May All become Happy,

2: May All be Free from Illness.

3: May All See what is Auspicious,

4: May no one Suffer.

5: Om Peace, Peace, Peace. (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: <http://www.namaskarhealing.com/Mantra-and-Prayer>)

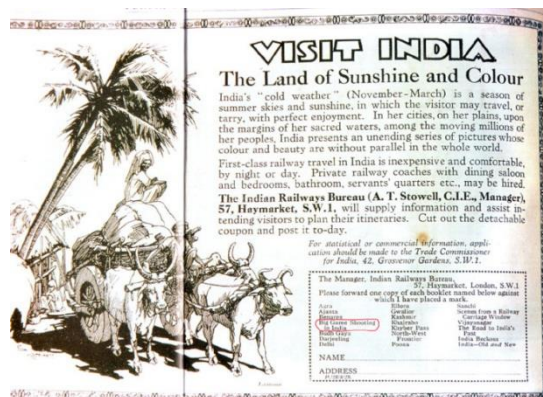
Significantly the shloka above mentions beings and not human beings. The shloka is echoed in chief Seattle thoughts also which he expressed in a letter to the US president Franklin Pierce when the latter offered to buy the land of the Red Indians, “The white man’s dead forget the country of their birth when they go to walk among the stars. Our dead never forget this beautiful earth, for it is the mother of the red man. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters, the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crest, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and the man, all belong to the same family.” (http://www.fwmartes.com.br/walter/english/texts/chief_seattle_letter.htm).

Besides the femininity-in-masculinity variant we have the masculinity-in-femininity variant on view in Nur Jahan who could shoot lions from the back of a moving elephant with deadly accuracy. A non-reactive shade of masculinity-in-femininity is reflected in Queen Elizabeth II who calmly walked past wild elephants, talked sweetly, shot wildlife with a camera and went back to England. If we combine the British attributes – formal, still and frugal – listed above,

we obtain the meta-attributes of single-mindedness and stability; listlessness and ennui. As B.J Gilbert Moore observes in the Anglo-Indian context that “there is a long tradition which sees India as destructive of the strongest spirits. As early as 1929 the *Bengalee* isolated ‘solitary and cheerless duties’ as the principal cause ‘of that train of desponding thought, which, it must be confessed, is too often the fate of the younger officers of our native army to suffer.’” (142). The parameters of masculinity and femininity, applied to this analysis, belong to the state of postcolonial hybridity and are, therefore, well in tune with western thinking. This analysis is not based on the ancient Indian concepts of Purusatva and Naritva which do not focus on genderized segregation, rigid casts or moulds and comparison but rather on the variety of these concepts depending on how different casts and clans understood them and made them their own with the trajectory being upwards towards excellence.

Evidently, thus, the masculinity of the Mughals was a complex, highly nuanced concept, which could eddy forth and connect with humble a servant as well as with the majestic lion. It was invested with intentional benevolence and it also resonated with the ancient scriptures. On the other hand, in the British we see a dull, non- reactive core which was connected to the mother country and not the colonized. It too, was benevolent but to England alone. While the Mughal imperial masculinity was clan based, the British imperial masculinity was projected as race based. The British colonial masculinity adhered strictly to colonial motives which it sought to achieve while maintaining a low profile and without any humanitarian distractions. However, it was wise enough to keep up appearances of helpfulness and royal charm and goodwill when it could be done without wasting money or putting in much effort. Hunting by the state acquired a fourfold dimension during the colonial period which sought, among other things, to enhance the colonial masculinity in a fourfold way and played havoc with nature. This fourfold hunting was:

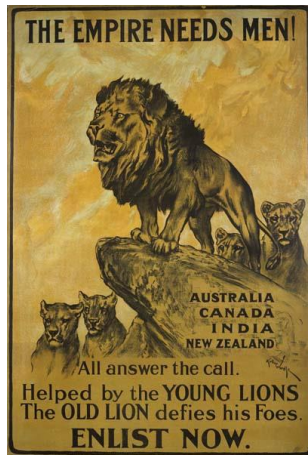
- a) hunting with a social obligation through state sponsored hunters like Jim Corbett who were sent to hunt down man-eaters - to create the myth of the great white hunter and protect the natives who supposedly could not protect themselves;
- b) ceremonial hunting, like the annual shikar trips by the viceroy;
- c) commercial hunting which involved inviting tourists to hunt and earn foreign exchange;



<http://sillyfunda.wordpress.com/2013/07/29/dwindling-tiger-population-wwf-initiative/#jp-carousel-787>

- d) and habitat hunting which meant large scale cutting of forests for wood to make railway sleepers and to grow a number of cash crops. The destruction of habitat was extremely harmful to the survival of Indian carnivores.

British masculinity was a powerful notion undoubtedly as it helped the British build a vast and global empire and then powerfully undid it through the folly of the World Wars as it lacked the wisdom of the ancient sages. This destruction, ironically, took place through the



images of the beast they nearly made extinct in India.

<http://www.ww1propaganda.com/ww1-poster/empire-needs-men-overseas-states-all-answer-call-helped-young-lions-old-lion-defies-his-foes>

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